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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KWMN](#) [KU](#) [WOMEN](#) [POLITICAL](#) [RIGHTS](#)

SUBJECT: MUNICIPAL COUNCIL: KUWAITI WOMEN'S SECOND VOTING RIGHTS BATTLEGROUND

Classified By: DCM Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (U) Summary: The Kuwaiti women's political participation debate has erupted on a second front: the Municipal Council. A new Municipality Law went into effect March 20 but without reference to the article that would have permitted women to vote, run for office and serve on the Municipal Council. Now, however, the Government has submitted an amendment to Parliament to reinstate the withdrawn article. The GOK claims municipal voting is merely the first step toward women's suffrage on the national level. Skeptics counter that this tactic will pacify Islamists opposed to full voting rights and effectively derail the movement for broader women's political participation. End summary.

2. (U) The GOK sent a Municipality Law amendment to the National Assembly April 5 to permit Kuwaiti women to vote in elections for, and participate on, the Municipal Council. The new law went into effect March 20 by Amiri decree, but the GOK removed Article 3, which would have granted women participatory rights, before enacting the legislation after MPs initially balked. The amendment has been referred to the Parliament's Public Utilities Committee, which will issue a report before the full Assembly can vote. Press reports and contacts indicate the amendment will pass with broad support. Even those MPs, including Islamists, who oppose women's participation at the national level support this measure.

3. (C) The GOK views this move as the first step toward full political participation for Kuwaiti women. Critics, such as activist Dr. Moudi Al-Humoud, however, charge that this half-measure may stymie efforts to grant full voting rights to women. Al-Humoud told poloff April 6 that National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi favors the step-by-step approach and is trying to convince Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to abandon the push for women's suffrage in favor of this gradual method. She fears Al-Khorafi may succeed.

4. (U) In addition, many Kuwaiti women who currently support full voting rights may be satisfied with Municipal participation thus removing their voices from the calls for full suffrage. The loss of these women would debilitate a poorly organized voting rights' campaign that already suffers from apathy.

5. (U) The Municipal Council oversees technical issues, such as zoning, roads and permits. There is currently only one Council for the entire country. It consists of 10 elected and six Government-appointed members and reports to Mohammed Daifallah Sharar, Deputy Premier and Minister of State for Cabinet and National Assembly Affairs.

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